The reproduction of hierarchy: skill, working-class culture and the state in early socialist Hungary

The Reproduction of Hierarchy: Skill, Working-Class Culture, and the State in Early Socialist Hungary*

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I. Introduction

On a night shift in Pit no. XII of the Tatabánya coal trust in November 1951, Sándor Hajósi, one of the most experienced coal hewers, worked at a poor position at the coal face, where he was unable to make his quota. As the hopelessness of his task dawned on him he became demoralized, slackening his work pace and growing ever more angry. Finally he threw down his pick in frustration. He confronted the deputy responsible for his section, arguing that as a "good worker" with experience he deserved a better work area where he would easily be able to fulfill his quota. His superior retorted that he should not argue but return to work. Rather than standing in solidarity with him, Hajósi's workmates were far from united as to whether his treatment had been just. One coal hewer new to the mine, Lajos Szabó, was heard to remark, reiterating the view of the deputy, that had Hajósi not put down his tools and argued he would have been able to fill two carts in the time he had wasted.[1]

The incident was reported in the newspaper of the party organization that covered the coal trust. Party officials, under pressure from their superiors in Budapest, were anxious to exhort ordinary miners to maintain work discipline even as management lost effective control of production.[2] Although party propagandists were eager to use tensions within the workforce for their own ends,

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[1] "Azt hallotuk, . . ." *Harc a Szénért* (November 29, 1951), p. 4.

[2] For more on the actual conditions of production in the coal mines during late 1951, see Mark Pittaway, "Industrial Workers, Socialist Industrialisation and the State in Hungary, 1948–1958" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Liverpool, 1998), pp. 110–49.

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such conflicts were not merely products of their wishful thinking. The more experienced miners regarded newcomers recruited in early 1951 as inferior to them. Such attitudes were related to conflicts between workers that were based on notions of skill and hierarchy that came to the fore when the regime put recruits to work after crash training courses created to replace traditional apprenticeships. Few of the experienced miners expressed their opposition to these changes publicly. There were exceptions; in a meeting in Pit no. VI one miner stated that he did not regard it as just "that somebody could become a coal-hewer after only one year." Instead he argued that "a miner should only be able to join a brigade after a good six to eight years' apprenticeship under a master."[3] The state was aware of widespread conflict over skill at Hungarian coal faces. In 1953 one policy maker, writing in the party's theoretical journal, criticized more experienced coal miners for their "skill-based chauvinism, the way they look down on new workers who have come straight from the village and on female workers."[4]

The disputes over skill and hierarchy in Hungary's coal mines during the early 1950s cast light on the conflicts over working-class identity that were generated by the state's program of industrial transformation. This program formed one plank of the drive to reshape Hungarian society along socialist lines that was initiated by the Stalinist dictatorship of Mátyás Rákosi in the late 1940s and early 1950s.[5] We know very little about the reactions of society as a whole to this program of transformation. This is because the bulk of research on the Rákosi era in recent years has focused on the destruction of civil society at the beginnings of the dictatorship, the show trials, and the mechanisms of repression that the state employed. Much of this work has reified state power, arguing that the Stalinist dictatorship was effectively able to strip society of its autonomy. Social groups, private business, religion, and independent associations have often been seen as passive victims of socialist despotism.[6]

[3] Komárom-Esztergom Megyei Levéltár (Komárom-Esztergom County Archive, hereafter KEML), Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt Komárom Megyei Bizottság Archivium iratai (Papers of the Archive of the Komárom County Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, hereafter MSZMP KMBA ir.) 32f.4/15ö.e., p. 26.

[4] András Kürti, "A bányászok közötti politikai munka néhány időszerű kérdése," *Társadalmi Szemle* 8 (1953): 1024–25.

[5] For an introduction to the social history of postwar Hungary, see Tibor Valuch, *Magyarország Társadalomtörténete a XX. Század Második Felében* (Budapest, 2001); the best recent general overview of the Stalinist years is provided in Ignác Romsics, *Magyarország Története a XX. Században* (Budapest, 1999), pp. 333–82; see also György Gyarmati, János Botos, Tibor Zinner, and Mihály Korom, *Magyar Hétköznapok Rákosi Mátyás Két Emigrációja Között, 1945–1956* (Budapest, 1988).

[6] For a sample of this work in both English and Hungarian, see Elemér Hankiss, *East*

That Rákosi's dictatorship, like its Stalinist counterparts across East-Central Europe, was despotic is beyond doubt. It is undeniable that it employed considerable repression in the pursuit of its policies. It is also clear that it initiated radical social change that was bitterly opposed by many of those affected. Agricultural cooperatives were created; peasants were subjected to extraordinary taxation, coercion, and police supervision. Private industry was decimated and large numbers of people were forced into industrial jobs. This picture, however, is one-sided. The Stalinist collectivization drives were abandoned in Hungary in 1953, and, though they were half-heartedly revived in 1955, Hungarian agriculture was not fully collectivized until 1961.[7] Despite the state's apparent grip on industry, large black markets, fueled by the failure of the state sector and endemic corruption, undermined the functioning of socialized enterprises. Large numbers of people were forced into industrial jobs, but informal wage bargaining, labor mobility, and behavior termed "labor indiscipline" meant that the state lacked authority over them.[8]

These processes are similar to those that have been identified by research in social history on socialist dictatorships in the Soviet Union and East-Central Europe outside Hungary. This research has examined "the limits of dictatorship" and has thus allowed the degree to which state power influenced social process to be investigated as a problem.[9] The issues of how the power of the

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European Alternatives (Oxford, 1990); Sándor Szakács and Tibor Zinner, *"A Háború Megváltozott Természete"—Adatok és adalékok* (Budapest, 1997); Éva Standeisky, Gyula Kozák, Gábor Pataki, and János M. Rainer, eds., *A Fordulat Évei, 1947–1949: Politika-Képzőművészet-Építészet* (Budapest, 1998); Ákos Róna-Tas, *The Great Surprise of the Small Transformation: The Demise of Communism and the Rise of the Private Sector in Hungary* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1997); Gyula Belényi and Lajos Sz. Varga, "Bevezetés," in *Munkások Magyarországon, 1948–1956: Dokumentumok,* ed. Gyula Belényi and Lajos Sz. Varga (Budapest, 2000), pp. 13–52; Sándor Szakács, "From Land Reform to Collectivization (1945–1956)," in *Hungarian Agrarian Society from the Emancipation of the Serfs (1848) to the Re-privatisation of the Land (1998),* ed. Péter Gunst, trans. Tünde Bodnár (Boulder, Colo., 1998), pp. 257–98.

[7] For agriculture, see Martha Lampland, *The Object of Labor: Commodification in Socialist Hungary* (Chicago, 1995), pp. 109–66; István Rév, "The Advantages of Being Atomized: How Hungarian Peasants Coped with Collectivization," *Dissent* (1987), pp. 335–50; Zsuzsanna Varga, *Politika, Paraszti Erdekérvényesítés és Szövetkezetek Magyarországon, 1956–1967* (Budapest, 2001).

[8] For industry and industrial labor, see Mark Pittaway, "The Social Limits of State Control: Time, the Industrial Wage Relation and Social Identity in Stalinist Hungary, 1948–1953," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 12 (1999): 271–301.

[9] The phrase "the limits of dictatorship" is borrowed from the title of an edited collection dealing with the GDR; see Richard Bessel and Ralph Jessen, eds., *Die Grenzen der Diktatur: Staat und Gesellschaft in der DDR* (Göttingen, 1996). Research in Soviet social history has explored "the limits of dictatorship" for some time; for a

socialist state affected industrial workers and how workers responded to state power have been identified by some of this research as central to an understanding of the nature of the "limits of dictatorship" and thus of socialist society. In the Soviet context, although individual scholars differ on the question of the extent of the power of industrial workers vis-à-vis the Stalinist state, there appears to be a consensus that the industrial workforce was endowed with a degree of countervailing power. Furthermore, social histories of industrial labor have shown that socialist industrialization utterly transformed the workforce as industry absorbed huge numbers of migrants from the countryside. During the 1930s a Soviet working class was made that was very different in terms of its culture and behavior from the workforce that existed during the 1920s.[10]

At the end of the 1940s the institutions of the state and economy in East-Central Europe were transformed along Soviet lines, as the Stalinist model was exported westward. When socialist industrialization began in these countries, the scope for the transformation of the industrial workforce was much smaller than it had been in the Soviet Union two decades earlier. Though there has been much less research done on the transformation of industrial labor and working-class community life in East-Central Europe than in the former Soviet Union, what work there is suggests that presocialist working-class culture remained resilient. For Poland, Padraic Kenney has argued that attempts during the very early postwar years to reshape the shop floor met with considerable resistance rooted in Polish working-class culture. Kenney suggests that the Stalinist state's transformation of Poland's industrial workforce was, at best,

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recent anthology of new research, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, ed., *Stalinism: New Directions* (London, 1999). For some of the best work on postwar Eastern Europe, see Melissa Bokovoy, *Peasants and Communists: Politics and Ideology in the Yugoslav Countryside, 1941–1953* (Pittsburgh, 1998); John Connelly, *Captive University: The Sovietization of East German, Czech, and Polish Higher Education, 1945–1956* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2000); Padraic Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland: Workers and Communists, 1945–1950* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1997); Jeffrey Kopstein, *The Politics of Economic Decline in East Germany, 1945–1989* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1997); and Carol S. Lilly, *Power and Persuasion: Ideology and Rhetoric in Communist Yugoslavia, 1944–1953* (Boulder, Colo., 2001).

[10] For a sample of this literature, see Donald Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialization: The Formation of Modern Soviet Production Relations, 1928–1941* (London, 1986); Hiroaki Kuromiya, *Stalin's Industrial Revolution: Politics and Workers, 1928–1932* (Cambridge, 1988); Lewis H. Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism and the Politics of Productivity in the USSR, 1935–1941* (Cambridge, 1988); Lewis H. Siegelbaum and Ronald Grigor Suny, eds., *Making Workers Soviet: Power, Class and Identity* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1994); Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley, Calif., 1995); Kenneth M. Straus, *Factory and Community in Stalin's Russia: The Making of an Industrial Working Class* (Pittsburgh, 1997); Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York, 1999).

highly uneven.[11] In the German Democratic Republic (GDR) a working-class culture, which survived the transformations in work and everyday life that the creation of socialist dictatorship brought in train, provided a basis for certain forms of collective behavior that placed real limits on state action.[12] For Czechoslovakia Peter Heumos has suggested that "trade unionist" attitudes inherited from the interwar period survived and motivated worker behavior throughout the early socialist years; this, in turn, limited the power of the state.[13]

In Hungary, as the institutions of dictatorship were built during 1948 and 1949 the country's new rulers attempted to transform industrial production, adapting models derived from Soviet practice, in order to lay the foundations for comprehensive economic planning. Wages tied to individual performance, socialist labor competition, the wider application of scientific management, and increased production targets were introduced.[14] These measures were much more than simply the instruments of centralized economic planning; they formed part of a program to create a class-conscious socialist working class out of the fragmented and divided presocialist workforce. Such societal goals were often captured in party propaganda. When the Stakhanovite movement emerged in Hungary in early 1950, the party daily hailed the new Stakhanovites as the "vanguard" of a "new working class." It proclaimed that "in the Stakhanovite movement a new kind of worker has appeared; the first signs of the new communist working class have emerged."[15] As the mentality of the "vanguard" spread throughout the workforce a "new working class" would be forged: "From the practice of their everyday life the toiling masses learn the truth of what theory tells us, that the construction of socialism . . . is tied to an increase in the welfare of the workers."[16]

Attempts to transform Hungary's working class using instruments such as payment-by-results and socialist labor competition, however, met with considerable opposition rooted in Hungarian shop-floor culture, where industrial workers jealously protected their on-the-job control. This was a particular issue among skilled workers who, through their unions, exercised considerable control over job rates. The conflict between the Stalinist revolution in production

[11] Kenney.

[12] Kopstein; Peter Hübner, *Konsens, Konflikt und Kompromiß: Soziale Arbeiterinteressen und Sozialpolitik in der SBZ/DDR, 1945–1970* (Berlin, 1995).

[13] Peter Heumos, "Normalisierung und soziale Beschwichtigungsstrategien in der ČSSR: KPTsch-Politik, Gewerkschaften und Arbeiterbewußtsein," in *Repression und Wohlstandsversprechen: Zur stabilisierung von Parteiherrschaft in der DDR und der ČSSR,* ed. Christoph Boyer and Peter Skyba (Dresden, 1999), pp. 119–28.

[14] Pittaway, "The Social Limits of State Control," pp. 276–82.

[15] "Új munkásosztály születik," *Szabad Nép* (March 5, 1950), p. 1.

[16] "Erősödő munkásosztály—emelkedő életszínvonal," *Szabad Nép* (February 5, 1950), p. 3.

and shop-floor culture was captured in the official biography of the Budapest Stakhanovite József Kiszlinger. Kiszlinger, a skilled worker in the highly unionized heavy engineering sector, had "endless problems with the older [workers]" when he tried to improve his own work performance. "Sometimes he worked with a different knife and managed to overfulfill his quota. The older ones attacked him: 'Are you insane? You're undermining us!' Even one of the union officials came to warn him: 'Watch yourself, son. This isn't a good idea. Don't go for too high a percentage.'"[17] As the institutions of the dictatorship were strengthened the state dealt with endemic shop-floor opposition by subordinating the trade unions to party policy—a process that was completed in early 1949.[18] The suppression of independent organizations in the workplace was, however, insufficient given that the state needed to mobilize substantial numbers of workers behind labor competition if they were to break the influence of traditional working-class culture.

Presocialist working-class culture was underpinned by notions of hierarchy, with the experienced, urban skilled worker at the top. Hierarchies of skill were not merely connected to knowledge and experience but were also overlain with deeply held ideas about gender and generation. Working-class cultures were often both deeply masculine and based upon seniority. Furthermore, political, economic, and cultural tensions between urban and rural dwellers, which were often overlain with assumptions about skill, were endemic.[19] The state deliberately subverted existing hierarchies to mobilize workers. In the early days of the labor competition the party leadership targeted younger workers and apprentices to considerable effect.[20] The state's use of the young to bust rates and pave the way for the transformation of production led to considerable tension. At the Bánhida power plant the authority of older stokers

[17] Domokos Varga, *Kiszlinger József Sztahanovista Esztergályos Élete és Munkamódszere* (Budapest, 1951), p. 20.

[18] Lajos Sz. Varga, *Szakszervezetek a Diktatúrában: A Magyar Dolgozók Pártja és a szakszervezetek, 1948–1953* (Pécs, 1995), pp. 13–94.

[19] For some useful surveys of the presocialist industrial workforce and shop-floor culture, see Iván T. Berend, "The Composition and Position of the Working Class during the War," in *Hungarian Economy and Society during World War II,* ed. György Lengyel, trans. Judit Pokoly (Boulder, 1993), pp. 151–68; György Földes, "Az újpesti munkásság életviszonyai az 1930-as években," *Történelmi Szemle* 2 (1980): 309–19; László Gereblyés, *Így Volt: Szociográfiai jegyzetek a 30–as évekből* (Budapest, 1959); Miklós Lackó, "Gépgyári munkások az 1930-as években," *Századok* 1–2 (1989): 3–44, *Ipari Munkásságunk Összetételének Alakulása, 1867–1949* (Budapest, 1961); Attila Paládi-Kovács, "Az Ipari Munkásság," in *Magyar Néprajz VIII: Társadalom,* ed. Attila Paládi-Kovács (Budapest, 2000), pp. 239–308; Gyula Rézler, ed., *Magyar Gyári Munkásság: Szociális Helyzetkép* (Budapest, 1940); Gyula Rézler, *Egy Magyar Textilgyár Munkástársadalma* (Budapest, 1943).

[20] A clear example of this kind of propaganda is *Harc a Másodpercekért! Kézikönyv az Országos Termelési Versenyhez* (Budapest, 1948).

and boiler men was challenged in 1949 by less experienced younger colleagues through the Stakhanovite movement. Although production relations were remade, they did not result in the creation of a "new working class"; instead, the state's subversion of generational hierarchies exacerbated preexisting divisions between workers. Tension between the two groups still persisted in 1951, when it was reported that "the older stokers still regard the experiences and methods of the younger Stakhanovites with contempt."[21] Rather than creating the basis for the transformation of working-class culture, as the state intended, the implementation of its policies produced conflict as many older workers sought to defend that culture and the traditional hierarchies embedded within it.

These conflicts set the stage for the growth of tension that accompanied the increase in the size of the labor force. With Hungary's first five-year plan, begun in 1950, a process of industrialization was initiated that demanded a huge expansion in the labor force. The state saw this as an opportunity to complete the task of creating its "new working class." For one senior party official, charged with leading political work on the country's largest construction site, increased employment under socialist conditions would allow "fearful, passive, insecure village laborers to be transformed into class-conscious, fighting workers."[22] In order to achieve this the state combined expansion of the workforce with a drive to open industrial employment to previously excluded groups and, in so doing, directly challenged the hierarchical nature of working-class culture. Traditional apprenticeships were abolished as young people were recruited en masse into key skilled positions through crash training courses that challenged older notions of apprenticeship and seniority.[23] Women were encouraged to regard socialist labor as a potential career, as campaigns were initiated to recruit women into the industrial workforce as men's equals.[24] Planners exhorted enterprises "not to place women into occupations that have been generally filled by women. . . . Women should be

[21] Politikatörténeti és Szakszervezeti Levéltár (Archive of Political History and Trade Unions, hereafter PtSzL), A Volt Szakszervezetek Központi Levéltár anyaga (Papers of the former Central Archive of the Trade Unions, hereafter SZKL), Komárom Szakszervezetek Megyei Tanácsa (Komárom County Council of Trade Unions, hereafter Komárom SZMT)/80d./1951, "Jegyzőkönyv felvétetett a Vas- és Fémipari Dolgozók Szakszervezete Komárom-megyei Területi Bizottság helységében Tatabányan megtartott Megye Bizottsági ülésről," p. 5.

[22] Quoted in *A Szocializmus Építésének Útján: A Magyar Dolgozók Pártja II, Kongresszusának Anyagából,* 2d ed. (Budapest, 1956), p. 276.

[23] Péter Darvas, "Oktatás és tervgazdálkodás," *Medvetánc* 4 (1983): 59–75.

[24] Joanna Goven, "The Gendered Foundations of Hungarian Socialism: State, Society and the Anti-Politics of Anti-Feminism, 1948–1990" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1993), pp. 30–108; Martha Lampland, "Biographies of Liberation: Testimonials to Labor in Socialist Hungary," in *Promissory Notes: Women in the Transition to Socialism,* ed. Sonia Kruks, Rayna Rapp, and Marilyn B. Young (New York, 1989), pp. 306–22.

directed to every occupation . . . except those which their physical strength prevents them filling."[25] This, likewise, directly challenged gendered hierarchies on Hungarian factory floors, provoking considerable resistance. The state introduced labor recruitment drives in poorer rural areas to find future skilled workers who could be trained in Hungary's industrial centers, thus directly challenging perceived hierarchies based on notions of an urban-rural divide.[26]

Despite its efforts the state did not get its "new working class," as challenges posed to hierarchy by regime policies met with ferocious resistance. Labor competition and wages based on payment-by-results were never embraced by Hungarian workers. They were only ever accepted insofar as they led to increased earnings, and acceptance often came at the cost of considerable tension between workers. As the first five-year plan was implemented in 1950 production targets were increased and wage levels fell, destroying even the limited consent on which the state's partial mobilization of the workforce had rested. The introduction of the plan led, furthermore, to the emergence of Hungary's early socialist "factory regime," which had profound effects on shop-floor culture.[27] Collectivist centralization at the national level was combined with individualized production targets for each worker to which wages were explicitly tied. Remuneration was linked to making the rate for a given job. At the same time, bottlenecks and shortages generated by the breakneck speed of socialist industrialization reshaped the rhythm of production, producing periodic shortages of work on factory floors. This environment only exacerbated the tensions between workers that had been generated by state attempts to subvert traditional hierarchies.[28] The number of workers in industry excluding construction rose from 412,590 in 1949 to 616,544 in 1953, while those in construction increased from 121,888 in 1950 to 194,827 in 1953.[29] Despite this increase, skilled, experienced labor was in short supply. Foremen largely promoted from the ranks of skilled workers believed in the hierarchies embedded in working-class culture. The demands of plan targets combined with the chaos of socialist production and submerged, yet widespread, working-

[25] Magyar Országos Levéltár (Hungarian National Archive, hereafter MOL), MDP-MSZMP Központi Szervek iratai (Papers of the central organs of the Hungarian Workers' Party—Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, hereafter MKS) 276f.116/43ö.e., pp. 15–17.

[26] MOL XIX-A-16b/138d., "Tervezet a munkaerőtoborzás szabályozásáról," p. 1.

[27] For more on the concept of "factory regimes" in both socialist and capitalist contexts, see Michael Burawoy, *The Politics of Production: Factory Regimes under Capitalism and Socialism* (London, 1985); Michael Burawoy and János Lukács, *The Radiant Past: Ideology and Reality in Hungary's Road to Capitalism* (Chicago, 1992).

[28] This is explored in much greater depth in my "The Social Limits of State Control" (n. 8 above).

[29] *Központi Statisztikai Hivatal Statisztikai Évkönyv, 1950* (Budapest, 1951), p. 13; *Központi Statisztikai Hivatal Statisztikai Évkönyv, 1953* (Budapest, 1954), p. 27.

class resistance forced management to cooperate with older skilled workers. This created the space for the reproduction of traditional hierarchies in the context of early socialist factories and mines as presocialist working-class culture remained resilient. Skilled workers reasserted their preeminent position, however, in opposition to members of previously marginal groups. Conflict around generation, gender, and social origin accompanied the reproduction of hierarchy in the context of socialist industrialization.

This article shows how the hierarchies that had underpinned presocialist shop-floor culture were defended and reasserted by skilled workers in the context of Hungary's early socialist factory regime. It begins by describing the material environment in which such hierarchies were reproduced by tracing the emergence of the early socialist factory regime in one industrial plant, paying particular attention to the patterns of dependence that grew between more experienced skilled workers and lower management. The focus is then broadened to examine industry as a whole in order to show how such patterns of dependence created space for presocialist hierarchies to reassert themselves in socialist factories. Finally, it proceeds to examine the reproduction of presocialist hierarchies by concentrating on shop-floor conflict around generation, gender, and social origin.

II. Popular Opposition, Collective Action, and Informal Bargaining: The Case of the Danube Shoe Factory

The experience of the Danube Shoe Factory sheds light on the changing patterns of conflict and cooperation in Hungarian industry during the early years of the first five-year plan. It provides a case study of how working-class opposition and the environment of socialist production generated informal cooperation between management and experienced skilled workers—cooperation that was a crucial precondition of the reproduction of hierarchy. By 1952 the Danube Shoe Factory was the largest shoe factory in the country. It produced 2,513,000 pairs of shoes during the year and employed 2,513 people.[30] It became an independent enterprise in 1948 and before that had been the shoemaking division of a larger leather-working plant. At the beginning of the first five-year plan it relied on handicraft methods and largely outdated technology.[31] Over the next three years the plant was dramatically extended and

[30] MOL Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt Budapesti Bizottság Archivium irarai (Papers of the Archive of the Budapest Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, hereafter MBp) 176f.2/190/10ö.e., p. 43.

[31] "22 nappal a kitűzött határidő előtt elkészült a 302-es tűző-és aljazókör: Hatalmas lendülettel folyik a munka az ötéves terv első évének kitűzött celjaiért," *Duna Híradó* (June 10, 1950), p. 3.

modernized. In 1949 the existing workshops were closed and transformed. Production was completely reorganized through the creation of vertically integrated workshops dealing with leather cutting and stitching. In each shop production was centered on production lines, with each worker performing specialized, narrowly defined tasks. New machinery was imported from the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia. The factory expanded as new workshops were added, allowing production to increase fivefold between 1948 and 1952. The intentions of economic planners in organizing work around a series of production lines were clearly stated by one Stakhanovite in the factory. As far as he was concerned, "with a production line it's possible to produce much more than before and one can really pay more attention to quality. . . . The whole process is so unified and continuous that the shoes can be looked at individually."[32]

The transformation of the Danube Shoe Factory reflected the broader industrial program of the new socialist state. Workers from smaller, older factories alongside newly nationalized artisans were concentrated in large-scale enterprises where production was "scientifically" organized. This proceeded alongside state attempts to speed up production through socialist labor competition, to create "scientifically" determined individual work targets, or quotas, and to tie remuneration explicitly to them.[33] These policies, implemented from 1949 onward, met with hostility from skilled workers used to on-the-job control, considerable autonomy, and the ability to regulate their own pace of work.[34] Party officials dismissed this discontent as "political backwardness that is closely connected with skill-based backwardness."[35]

Workers outside the Danube Shoe Factory also were suspicious of the intentions of the state in production. In the workplace, industrial workers developed a strictly instrumental attitude toward payment-by-results and socialist labor competition. Workers only participated where direct material benefits resulted.[36] The late 1940s were, fortunately for the new regime, a period when real wages rose rapidly.[37] When wages fell, or when the state attempted to raise productivity by increasing production quotas, a wave of shop-floor protest

[32] For this comment, see ibid.; for the rising production of the new factory as it was modernized, see MOL MBp 176f.2/190/10ö.e., p. 43; on the expansion of the production line system throughout the factory, see *Futószalag* (March 5, 1952), p. 3, and (April 19, 1952), p. 4; for that information on the extent of the transformation of the plant, see *Futószalag* (September 25, 1952), p. 1.

[33] Pittaway, "The Social Limits of State Control," pp. 276–82.

[34] Budapest Főváros Levéltára (Archive of the City of Budapest, hereafter BFL) XXIX/553f./1d./, "Kijelentés."

[35] MOL MBp 95f.4/147ö.e., p. 74.

[36] Tibor Garai, *A Kultúrtényező Jelentősége a Versenyszellem Kialakulásaban* (Budapest, 1948), pp. 14–15.

[37] "A magyar munkásosztály fejlődése" (unpublished manuscript, Library of the Central Statistical Office, Budapest, 1954), p. 20.

resulted.[38] In the second half of 1949 the regime launched a drive to tie workers' wages to individual work targets to prepare for the beginning of the first five-year plan in 1950. Individual forms of labor competition were aggressively promoted in a bid to pave the way for individualized quotas, and thus remuneration. In the run-up to the so-called Stalin shift, the campaign to celebrate the Soviet leader's seventieth birthday in December 1949, the Stakhanovite movement was introduced in Hungary.[39] The new Stakhanovites were widely distrusted since workers feared that increases in production targets for all would follow from the exceptional performance of a few.[40] There was, however, little general discontent as high quota fulfillment led to increased wages across industry in the first months of 1950.[41] This tacit compromise was broken by sharp increases in production targets during the summer. These led to increased work intensity and reduced wages and provoked one of the largest waves of open worker unrest in the postwar period. The state responded to the slightest signs of discontent with repression. Even individual acts of protest were ruthlessly crushed by the state security services.[42]

The effects of increased production targets on workers in the Danube Shoe Factory were not dissimilar to those elsewhere. The new quotas were difficult to fulfill: a majority of workers in the plant failed to make them in the second half of 1950, and wages fell accordingly.[43] Older workers in the factory unfavorably compared working conditions and wages under socialism to those that existed prior to nationalization in 1948. Such older workers told their newer colleagues that "under Wolfner (the previous capitalist owner) they had a better life." They complained that the basis of the system was "the enslavement of the worker."[44]

Manifestations of nostalgia for presocialist conditions, though those con-

[38] MOL MKS 276f.116/18ö.e., p. 6.

[39] For the background to the changes of late 1949, see Gyula Hevesi, "A magyar sztahanovista mozgalom sajátossági és fetadatai ipari tartalékaink mozgósításában," *Társadalmi Szemle* 5 (1950): 30–32, and *Sztahanov Útján: A Magyar Újítómozgalom Fejlődése és Feladatai* (Budapest, 1950), pp. 85–103.

[40] Zala Megyei Levéltár (Zala County Archive, hereafter ZML), Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt Zala Megyei Bizottság Archivium iratai (Papers of the Archive of the Zala County Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, hereafter MSZMP ZMBA ir.) 57f.1/52ö.e., p. 20.

[41] MOL MKS 276f.116/18ö.e., pp. 22–23.

[42] MOL MBp 95f.4/120ö.e., p. 214; PtSzL SZKL Komárom SZMT/42d./1950, "Szakszervezetek Országos Tanácsa Esztergom-Komárom Megye Bizottság, Tatabánya, 1950. augusztus 24," p. 1; PtSzL SZKL Komárom SZMT/43d./1950, "Kiértékelés," p. 1; PtSzL SZKL Komárom SZMT/43d./1950, "Szakszervezetek Országos Tanácsa Esztergom-Komárom Megyei Bizottság, Tatabánya, Jelentés, 1950 augusztus 2," p. 1.

[43] MOL MBp 95f.4/120ö.e., p. 252.

[44] Open Society Archives (OSA), Radio Free Europe Hungarian Collection (RFE Magyar Gy.), Interviews with Escapees (6)/Item no. 3677/56, p. 3.

ditions had often been poor, were fed by the deep sense of betrayal many workers felt when faced with the results of the policies of the socialist regime. Workers in industry as a whole believed themselves to be exploited by "a bloodsucking government."[45] These perceptions of exploitation helped ensure that presocialist working-class identity persisted in early socialist factories and mines. Many of the complaints about low wages, high work intensity, and despotic management that had provided the backdrop to working-class political activism in the interwar and immediate postwar years persisted.[46] Such complaints after 1950 came to be directed against the state. In the Tatabánya mines during the early 1950s "there was a great deal of discontent among the miners; they denounced the system and grumbled that despite the difficulty of their work pay was low."[47] Deep-seated discontent with working conditions and the system in general persisted in the Danube Shoe Factory throughout the early 1950s. Because of the threat of repression it rarely took the form of open collective action, and when it did, fear of the state security services blunted its impact. One former worker who escaped to the West recounted that "in 1953 there were grumbles about the quotas. One time the workers went out on an unofficial smoke break to protest. Work stopped for ten minutes. Because the workers didn't want to risk any more, management simply forgot the incident, and no one felt the consequences."[48]

Working-class opposition to the regime and the solidarity it generated sustained a whole range of practices that subverted management intentions in production and partially substituted for more open forms of collective protest. Industrial workers engaged in widespread, though concealed, acts of protest—as one former worker remembered, "psychologically the situation was . . . that they [the workers] were happy if they could harm the Communist system."[49] Workers cooperated to subvert the quality-control systems in the factory. The plant newspaper criticized workers for accepting and passing on without question the poor-quality shoes made by others.[50] Discontent also manifested itself through widespread theft by workers.[51] This provided the basis for participa-

[45] PtSzL Szakszervezetek Országos Tanácsa (National Council of Trade Unions, hereafter SZOT), Bérosztály (Wage Department)/33d./1953, "Feljegyzés a kormányprogrammal kapcsolatos üzemi tapasztalatokról," p. 1.

[46] For a survey of working-class political activism in interwar Hungary, see Péter Sipos, *Legális és Illegális Munkásmozgalom Magyarországon, 1919–1944* (Budapest, 1988); for the immediate postwar years, see Miklós Habuda, *A Magyar Szakszervezetek a Népi Demokratikus Forradalomban, 1944–1948* (Budapest, 1986).

[47] OSA RFE Magyar Gy. 6./Item no. 8083/54, p. 12.

[48] Ibid./Item no. 3677/56, p. 2.

[49] Ibid./Item no. 08794/53, p. 1.

[50] "A 301-es kör dolgozóinak feladata a kormányprogramm megvalósításáért," *Futószalag* (August 29, 1953), p. 3.

[51] OSA RFE Magyar Gy.6/Item no. 3677/56, p. 3.

tion by workers in informal and often illegal economic activity outside the factory.[52] Former artisans stole raw materials to manufacture and repair shoes within the framework of the black economy. In 1955, one worker who had been fined on five occasions for theft was finally dismissed and prosecuted for stealing 20,000 forints' worth of leather, sole, and other related materials.[53] There was, however, almost no scope for expressions of working-class discontent outside the factory, and solidarity between workers behind the factory gates was severely limited. This was not only because of repression but also due to a particularistic climate that grew on the factory floor as a result of the circumstances of socialist production.

Both across the economy and in the Danube Shoe Factory the individualization of production and remuneration increased wage differentials between workers—often between workers who had the same job description. Furthermore, the implementation of the regime's policy of rapid industrialization led to the emergence of widespread shortages of materials, labor, machinery, and tools in Hungarian industry during the early 1950s.[54] This meant that production and earnings were at the mercy of the operation of the planned economy. The Danube Shoe Factory constantly struggled with unpredictable deliveries of raw materials that completely depended on the situation of its supplying enterprise. As one manager put it, "if the leather factory is only making 70–80 percent of its plan target, then we'll never make 100 percent."[55] The result was considerable fluctuation in earnings. The monthly pay of one typical worker stood in September 1952 at 981 forints, rose to 1124 forints in October, and then fell back to 822 forints in November.[56] Along with this fluctuation in earnings, take-home pay in the shoe industry was well below the industrial average. In 1953, 30 percent of workers were in the lowest wage categories, while 60 percent were in the median wage category for industry as a whole. Hourly wages were lower in shoe production, category for category, than the industrial average. This led to low wages for skilled workers; the lowest wages for the skilled were as little as 500 forints per month. Unskilled shoemakers earned between 450 and 580 forints.[57]

Low and fluctuating wages led to high labor turnover in the plant and a problem of permanent labor shortage.[58] The quality of the shoes produced declined. In part this was due to the poor quality of much of the leather supplied

[52] MOL MBp 176f.2/190/6ö.e., p. 204.
[53] Lajos Szabó, "A társadalmi tulajdon védelme," *Futószalag* (April 9, 1955), p. 3.
[54] Pittaway, "The Social Limits of State Control" (n. 8 above), 282–86.
[55] MOL MBp 176f.2/190/6ö.e., p. 242.
[56] MOL MBp 176f.2/190/7ö.e., p. 73.
[57] PtSzL SZKL SZOT Bérosztály/30d./1953, "Bőripari Dolgozók Szakszervezete Munkabérosztály Vezető levél," pp. 4–5.
[58] MOL MBp 176f.2/190/10ö.e., pp. 6–13.

to the plant. The effects of shortage on the production lines led to a loss of managerial control over the shop floor. The strict vertical integration of tasks within the factory that the introduction of a system based around production lines entailed created the space for small groups of workers to resort to crude though highly effective forms of shop-floor bargaining around wages. Informal bargaining often occurred in the stitching shops where the shoes were assembled. Workers seeking an easier quota for a given job and who had tasks that were crucial to the assembly of the shoe would go slow on their jobs. This caused work stoppages further down the line, leading in turn to discontent among the affected workers that lower management had to deal with. This was especially effective as a strategy where it endangered plan fulfillment. While the authorities were far from inclined to give in to this kind of action, management, faced with severe labor shortages, had little alternative.[59]

Informal bargaining of this kind reshaped shop-floor relations in the factory, leading to what management termed "disorganization" of the wage system as struggles on the production lines increasingly determined wage levels and differentials.[60] Certain groups of workers—namely, older experienced skilled workers—benefited disproportionately from informal bargaining. This was because socialist production had created circumstances in which management developed a dependence on certain workers to solve problems in production. The initiative and skill of these workers thus, paradoxically, became crucial to a labor process designed to develop greater control over them. They were able to manipulate this situation and turn it to their own advantage, demanding better working conditions and higher levels of remuneration for their work. This was illustrated by one production run in the leather cutting shops in late 1951. Low quality leather was delivered to the shop that could not easily be cut on the production lines by the inexperienced new labor working there. As a result, shop management reorganized production. It concentrated the small number of experienced workers into brigades of five, separating them from the rest, giving them special lower quotas, and allowing them to perform the best work. Lower paying, discontinuous work was given to the rest.[61]

Informal bargaining generally benefited more experienced skilled workers because of the patterns of cooperation and mutual dependence that developed between the skilled and lower management. It was this characteristic of informal bargaining that created the material backdrop to the reproduction of traditional hierarchies because of the connections that existed between notions of skill and such hierarchies. These patterns of dependence and cooperation between experienced skilled workers and lower management were not merely

[59] *Futószalag* (March 22, 1952), p. 3.
[60] Ibid. (April 28, 1952), p. 3.
[61] MOL MBp 176f.2/190/2ö.e., p. 139.

a characteristic of shoe manufacture; they existed across industry, construction, and mining. They resulted not only from the imperatives of production but also arose because foremen, shop managers, and experienced skilled workers shared certain common values and attitudes that were inherited from presocialist working-class culture. Such patterns of bargaining therefore contributed to the reproduction of hierarchies that had been rooted in that culture.

III. The Meaning of Skill: Hierarchy, Working-Class Culture, and Socialist Production

In spring 1953 the regime began to pay attention to the skill level of the industrial workforce. This was because of the poor quality of much production. In 1952 the calorie content of the coal mined in the Nográd field for export to Czechoslovakia was so low that it could not be sold. In the machine industry the parts for coal-cutting machinery were so poorly cast that they often broke.[62] The authorities blamed the low skill level of the workforce for the poor quality of production. Despite figures showing that the percentage of skilled workers in industry increased from 32.1 percent in 1949 to 48.2 percent in 1953,[63] questions were raised as to whether such figures reflected the true skill level of the workforce. One party investigator examining work methods in the machine industry was horrified by the methods used by many "young workers." He reported that "the workers are not clear about even the most basic questions. For example, in the repair and assembly shop one worker used a tool that should never have been used for that particular process . . . or he just put a run through the machine as fast as possible without caring what came out, or used such a large drilling bit that he could not possibly have drilled a hole with regard to any technical specifications at all."[64]

Similar conclusions had been reached by managers, if not by the authorities, long before 1953. During the early years of socialist industrialization the state had been deeply suspicious of such arguments. Many foremen had been directly criticized for allocating good work to more experienced workers on these grounds and neglecting newer workers.[65] They had in fact done this for two reasons. The first was practical: experienced skilled workers were in short supply. The poaching of skilled labor and labor turnover were widespread, and

[62] MOL MKS 276f.94/591ö.e., pp. 110, 127–37.

[63] "A magyar munkásosztály fejlődése" (n. 37 above), p. 17.

[64] MOL MKS 276f.94/591ö.e., p. 62.

[65] These kinds of criticisms can be seen in PtSzL SZKL Fejér Szakszervezetek Megyei Tanácsa (Fejér County Council of Trade Unions, hereafter Fejér SZMT)/72d./1951, "Jelentés az iparba került dolgozók helyzetének néhány tapasztalatáról," pp. 1–3.

state regulations to prevent this, though draconian, were ineffective.[66] Second, there was considerable social solidarity between foremen and the best skilled workers across industry. Most foremen had been promoted from the ranks of the skilled workers; this connection had been accentuated by the purges initiated in 1950 and 1951 against foremen with a "capitalist" past. The result in one large Budapest factory, which was far from untypical, was that in 1951 "95 percent [of foremen] had worked in their current positions for under a year, and prior to that they had been skilled workers or semiskilled machinists in the factory."[67] Skilled workers had been able to use their positions to secure for themselves preferential access to raw materials, unofficial wage rates, or quotas that were easier to reach than those officially laid down. This had often been achieved at the expense of workers who were either less skilled or less experienced, or even excluded for other reasons from the small groups of workers able to use their skill as a bargaining chip with lower management.

Skill was a contested category on Hungarian shop floors during the early 1950s. To be a skilled worker in presocialist Hungary meant to have attained skill and experience of a given production process during a long period of apprenticeship. As part of its bid to rapidly expand the workforce the state replaced apprenticeships with crash training programs. Older skilled workers bitterly resented younger, newer workmates being given the same wage rates when they had only completed short training programs that were felt to be inferior to traditional apprenticeships.[68] Skill was not only a matter of experience or training, though it was of course very much tied to these; it was also a social and cultural construct bound to hierarchies based on gender, generation, and social origin that had been inherited from presocialist working-class culture.

The identification of "good," "experienced," or even "skilled" workers was as much linked to such perceived hierarchies as it was to actual attributes of skill or experience. These perceived hierarchies could exclude others from the highly particular groups upon which informal bargaining was based. The Party Committee of the fourth district of Budapest conducted an investigation into poor third quarter plan fulfillment in the Danube Shoe Factory in October 1952. They found that one workshop received worse raw materials than the others. Its plan fulfillment was consistently poor. Management dumped inexperienced workers there. The wage affairs officer of the factory trade union branch told

[66] For evidence of the poaching of skilled labor in heavy industry, see ZML MSZMP ZMBA ir. 57f.1/52ö.e., pp. 47–49; on labor mobility, see Gyula Belényi, *A Sztálini Iparosítás Emberi Ára. Foglalkozási átrétegződés és belső vándorlás Magyarországon (1948–1956)* (Szeged, 1993), pp. 106–9.

[67] Quoted in László Varga, *Pató Pálok vagy sztahanovisták?* (Budapest, 1984), p. 71.

[68] Pittaway, "Industrial Workers, Socialist Industrialisation and the State" (n. 2 above), pp. 170–76.

investigators that "across the factory this production line is nicknamed 'the agricultural cooperative conveyor.' In part the workers use this term because of the large number of workers from rural areas who are on it, and also because of the number of beginners."[69] The introduction of women to certain jobs in heavy industry was fiercely resisted by male skilled workers and foremen. This was crucial in determining the gender composition of the industrial workforce. In the Óbuda Gas Factory skilled workers told women that "they should leave their jobs, because they aren't suitable for them." In the Bázakerretye Oil Drilling Plant, male skilled workers were accused of not regarding their female colleagues as proper workers. Persistent problems of intimidation were reported.[70] Foremen reserved the best work for male skilled workers, while allocating the worst to women. In the Elzett Factory, "the female employees were put on different machines each day, hindering their chances of making their rate."[71] The rapid promotion of young workers taught their skill on crash training schemes provoked opposition from older skilled workers on the grounds that this challenged seniority and perceived generational hierarchies. Older skilled workers often complained that their younger colleagues were inept, undisciplined, and corrupt.[72] Many foremen shared these opinions. This led to active discrimination against many recently trained young workers. In the Ganz Vaggon Factory one young worker was allocated the jobs that no one else would take on a regular basis and that, in some cases, were judged by union investigators to be physically impossible.[73]

IV. Generations of Skill: Work, Youth, and Bargaining

Struggles around skill and hierarchy were most clearly in evidence where generational tension on the shop floor was marked. Seventy-five thousand young workers who entered industry between 1948 and 1953 trained as skilled workers in the crash training programs instituted after the abolition of the

[69] MOL MBp 176f.2/190/7ö.e., p. 244.

[70] For the incident in the Óbuda Gas Factory, see PtSzL SZKL Fejér SZMT/72d./1951, "Jelentés a nők munkaállitása és a velük való foglalkozás nehány tapasztalatáról," p. 3; for the various incidents at Bázakerretye, see ZML MSZMP ZMBA ir. 61f.3/3/PTO/6ö.e., "Jelentés az MDP Üzemi Pártbizottságtól az MDP Letenye Járási Pártbizottságnak, 1953. marc. 6," p. 1.

[71] PtSzL SZKL Fejér SZMT/72d./1951, "Jelentés a nők munkaállitása és a velük való foglalkozás nehány tapasztalatáról," p. 3.

[72] BFL XXIX/321/1d., "Jegyzőkönyv, felvétetett 1951, december hó 15.—én reggel 6 órakor a II: Alapszerv szakszervezeti helyiségben megtartandó termelési értekezlet," p. 3.

[73] PtSzL SZKL Fejér SZMT/72d./1951, "Jelentés az iparba került dolgozók helyzetének néhány tapasztalatáról," p. 1.

apprenticeship system.[74] By 1953 it was clear to economic planners that workers trained in these crash programs were insufficiently skilled. When newly trained workers went into productive life, they were only able to fulfill their quotas if they were given work that fell into low wage categories, thus leading to a problem of low pay.[75] The authorities gradually became aware of this problem. The evidence often quoted by official inspectors for the poor skill levels of many younger workers was their frequent recourse to highly unorthodox work methods, or their blatant lack of concern for the quality of what they produced. One inspector examining shop-floor production in the machine industry clearly stated he was convinced that many of the younger workers were "unable to judge their own work."[76]

The poor quality of state-sponsored mass training schemes placed young workers at a disadvantage when they entered productive life. Yet the low wages of young workers and their use of questionable work methods were not exclusively the result of poor training. Before 1953 their older colleagues noticed a clear difference between themselves and younger workers in their attitudes toward work. This led them to complain about undisciplined young workers. In the United Lighting and Electrics Factory an older Stakhanovite complained: "In our workshop there are sixteen Stakhanovites, of whom six are young. From them it seems that work with the younger ones is not satisfactory. It's not only us; the young ones are to blame too. They go to get the high percentages, ignoring the fact that they should first look to the quality of what they produce, and only then the quantity. There are those who just ignore our warnings, and answer back, saying they'll pay a few forints penalty for producing scrap if in the end they get higher earnings."[77] In the neighbouring Duclós Mine Machinery Factory these differences fed generational tension. One party member described a piece of work completed by a young worker that the quality-control department had sent back: "I was curious as to why and looked at it. . . . The whole of the part was not properly cut. I don't know how such people can get work." Another recounted an incident in which "Simon [the young worker] asked for two knives. I gave him two knives that the foreman had cleared as being good for the job. . . . Simon replied that they were not usable and in the middle of this swore at me." Another blamed young workers for destroying grinding machines by employing unauthorized methods to make their quotas.[78]

Behind this generational tension lay deep-seated resentment on the part of

[74] "A magyar munkásosztály fejlődése" (n. 37 above), p. 12.

[75] PtSzL SZKL SZOT Bérosztály/30d./1953, "Könnyüipari és Mezőgazdasági Osztály Jelentés," p. 5.

[76] MOL MKS 276f.94/591ö.e., p. 61.

[77] BFL XXIX/321/2d., "Jegyzőkönyv felvétetett 1952, szeptember 20—án az Egyesült Izzó Kulturtermeiben megtartott III: Sztahanovista konferenciáról," p. 6.

[78] MOL MBp 176f.2/191/4ö.e., pp. 138–39.

older skilled workers at the role the growth in the number of young workers trained on crash courses had played in subverting traditional generational hierarchies that had characterized presocialist shop-floor culture. This resentment manifested itself in the form of complaints about the nature and behavior of the young workers who had entered productive life through such training schemes. In the United Lighting and Electrics Factory, one skilled worker complained that "there are trainees who have absolutely no interest in the skill that they train for. It would be better to send them elsewhere, because all they do is destroy work discipline."[79] In the same factory older skilled workers simply "did not want to accept" new trainees as skilled workers.[80] In the early 1950s this attitude was condemned officially by the regime as "skill-based chauvinism" and was regarded as a manifestation of the "underground work of right-wing Social Democrats."[81]

The foremen often identified with older workers, from whose ranks many of them had been drawn and whose attitudes they shared. In 1952 the factory party committee of the United Lighting and Electrics Factory believed that many of the plant's engineers and foremen were "former Social Democrats" with little attachment to socialist work methods. It accused them of enjoying "good relations with members of the aristocracy of labor," code for older skilled workers in the plant.[82] On the socialist shop floor the distribution of work affected individuals' abilities to make their quotas. The solidarity that existed between older workers and foremen often helped ensure that older workers received more of the highly lucrative work available than did their younger workmates. In the tool-making shop of the United Lighting and Electrics Factory, newly qualified apprentices "almost never received decent jobs. . . . Some workers are able to take only work that they judge to be advantageous to themselves."[83] In the Vacuum Technology division of the factory the plant director drew attention to the effects of informal bargaining in May 1953: "The informal selection of work has still not disappeared. As a consequence of this the large, long batches are given to the key workers and for this reason young, promising workers are just not able to develop."[84] In the Danube Shoe Factory their unfavorable situation within the internal division of labor of the plant led

[79] BFL XXIX/321/1d., "Jegyzőkönyv, felvétetett 1951, December hó 15—én reggel 6 órakor a II. Alapszerv szakszervezeti helyiségben megtartandó termelési értekezlet," p. 3.

[80] MOL MBp 134f./22ö.e., p. 172.

[81] For some examples of reports that show regime concern about "right-wing Social Democrats" in Budapest, see the documents in MOL MBp 95f.2/168/bö.e. and MOL MBp 95f.3/345ö.e.

[82] MOL MBp 176f.2/194/19ö.e., p. 14; MOL MBp 176f.2/194/23ö.e., pp. 82–89.

[83] MOL MBp 176f.2/194/19ö.e., p. 17.

[84] BFL XXIX/321/4d., "Levél a Vacumntechnikai Gépgyár Gyáregységvezetőtől a T. P.Nagy Balázs elvtársnak, 1953. V. 6."

young skilled workers to quit their jobs in greater numbers than any other group in November 1953.[85]

Job quitting was a criminal offense, and though the laws against it were unevenly applied it was still potentially dangerous.[86] Young workers often had to resort to other strategies. In the Duclós Mining Machinery Factory in 1954 the only good work, according to many young workers, was that "where the quota could be fulfilled by 170 percent, or enough to get the desired amount of money." When work was issued without the right quota or rate of pay "an endless amount of scrap was produced."[87] In 1952, in one textile factory, underperforming workers frequently submitted blatantly fraudulent time sheets to the factory administration, counting on the negligence of the foremen to get them passed. A query from the quota office or a failure to pay the claimed amount resulted in small groups of workers abandoning their machines for ten minutes to complain, disrupting production on an entire floor.[88]

Party inspectors who entered factories in 1953 reported that the reasons for the poor quality of much production were to be found in the inadequate skill level of "new" skilled workers, but this gave only part of the picture. The problem of training skilled workers along with the short supply of experienced skilled labor provided part of the material background to generational conflict on the shop floor. Such conflict was as much related to notions of how skill was acquired and how it was connected to perceived generational hierarchies as it was to actual skill levels. Older workers used their ideas about skill—something that could only be transferred through long and careful study on the shop floor under a master, and that was closely related to age and experience—as a bargaining chip. In factories across the country in the early 1950s the key to maximizing earnings was to gain sufficient work to make the quota. Older workers were able to use their ideas about skill being intimately tied to experience, length of service, and generation to secure a monopoly over such work. As a result of younger workers' allocation to frequently impossible jobs, abuse of machinery was often a rational response to their position in a structure of shop-floor bargaining that was heavily skewed against them.

By 1953 policy makers had come to accept the assumptions of older workers about skill, retreating from earlier notions that had branded those who held such ideas as "skill-based chauvinists." In 1951 an official report had attacked a factory manager for discriminating against a young worker;[89] by 1954 such

[85] MOL MBp 176f.2/190/11ö.e., p. 202.

[86] On the application of the law to prevent job quitting in the early 1950s, see Tamás Gyekiczky, *A Fegyelem Csapdájában: Munkafegyelmi kampányok társadalmi hatásának elemzése* (Budapest, 1989), pp. 25–89.

[87] MOL MBp 176f.2/191/9ö.e., pp. 27–28.

[88] MOL MBp 143f./10ö.e., pp. 84–87.

[89] PtSzL SZKL Fejér SZMT/72d./1951, "Jelentés az iparba került dolgozók helyzetének néhány tapasztalatáról," p. 1.

reports were discussing the percentages of young workers who had an "insufficient command of their craft."[90] These retreats by policy makers underlined the extent to which hierarchies that had underpinned presocialist working-class culture had been able to reassert themselves in the environment of the early socialist factory.

V. Gendered Conflict: Women, Men, and the Politics of Work

Open gender conflict in Hungarian industry was much rarer than open generational conflict, though gendered hierarchies played a central role in shaping working-class identities during the early 1950s. As industrial employment expanded, women were encouraged to regard socialist labor as a calling and consequently to enter jobs previously closed to them.[91] The women who tried met with obstacles similar to those faced by younger male workers in attempting to establish themselves in their workplaces, especially when they took skilled positions. Margit Fekete arrived in the male-dominated construction sector as an aspiring skilled worker. On May 4, 1951, she took work at Sztálinváros, where a steel plant and new town were to be built, as a trainee reinforced-concrete fitter. On completing her course in November, management assigned her to Site XII. Site XII, she later complained, "didn't take me on; they said the work was not suitable for women. I then asked why our state taught me if that was the case." The refusal to employ her occurred when the site was short of ten reinforced-concrete fitters.[92]

It was not merely management, nor the undoubted physical difficulty of the work, that represented a barrier to women establishing themselves as construction workers, though both these factors played their part. By early 1952 there were 2,541 women at Sztálinváros, where a total of 14,708 were employed.[93] Some women recruits undoubtedly did find the work difficult and actively sought reassignment to easier jobs. Management on the Sztálinváros construction site, watched closely by the party leadership in Budapest, made stronger efforts to integrate women into the workforce than at any other establishment in the country. Sztálinváros was conceived as a showpiece of the new socialist

[90] "A magyar munkásosztály fejlődése" (n. 37 above), p. 17.

[91] Lampland, "Biographies of Liberation" (n. 24 above).

[92] Margit Fekete, "Szünjék meg a szakmunkások belső munkanélkülisége," *Sztálin Vasmű Épitője* (December 14, 1951), p. 2.

[93] Fejér Megyei Levéltár (Fejér County Archive, hereafter FML), Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt Fejér Megyei Bizottság Archiviuma (Archive of the Fejér County Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, hereafter MSZMP FMBA ir.) 17f.2/22ö.e., "Jelentés a Sztálinvárosi Pártbizottság agitációs munkájáról," p. 1.

society that the state set out to build.[94] Furthermore, the construction site was at the forefront of the attempts of economic planners to eliminate the "artisanal nature" of Hungary's construction industry and to transform it along modern socialist lines.[95] Given the stress placed by the state on equality for women in socialist labor, management sought to provide ways to integrate women into what was essentially a male industry. It attempted to do this by creating a women-only work site, which was heralded as a pioneering measure by officials. This was to be one small part of construction at Sztálinváros. The aim of the work site was to ensure that women were given appropriate tasks and that they were adequately prepared for work at other locations in Sztálinváros. To this end they were assisted by a team of full-time trainers who were given the task of educating the female bricklayers and unskilled workers in new, Soviet-inspired work methods.[96] According to party reports, after several months a majority of female workers had become accustomed to their work and were able to fulfill their quotas easily.[97]

The women-only work site was also created to protect newly recruited female construction workers from the sexism of their male colleagues. Male construction workers refused to accept the presence of women in their industry. With the creation of the women-only work site these attitudes manifested themselves in the form of rumors about the performance of the female skilled workers employed there. In one case in early 1952, a rumor that a chimney built by an all-woman brigade had collapsed led to an investigation by site management, who quickly concluded that the rumor was unfounded.[98] Outside the women-only work site the men subjected female construction workers to campaigns of verbal, and sometimes physical, harassment. One all-women brigade formed in late spring 1951 faced frequent taunts from male workers,

[94] Ferenc Erdös, "Dunapentelétől Sztálinvárosig," in *Dunaújváros Története,* ed. Ferenc Erdős and Zsuzsanna Pongrácz (Dunaújváros, 2000), pp. 243–80; István Horváth et al., eds., *Dunaferr—Dunai Vasmű Krónika* (Dunaújváros, 2000); Miklós Miskolczi and András Rózsa, "A Huszéves Dunai Vasmű" (unpublished manuscript, Dunaújváros, 1969); Tibor Weiner, "Sztálinváros," in *Sztálinváros—Miskolc—Tatabánya: Városépítésünk Fejlődése,* ed. Aladár Sós et al. (Budapest, 1959), pp. 17–88.

[95] István Hámor, "Lakóháztípusok fejlődése a Sztálin Vasmű tükrében," *Építés—Építészet* 3 (1951): 628.

[96] "A Nők Foglakoztatásáról és Helyzetéről az Építőiparban 1951: Májusban az Építő-, Fa- és Építőanyagipari Dolgozók Szakszervezete Termelési Osztálya Jelentése," in Belényi and Varga, eds. (n. 6 above), p. 172.

[97] FML MSZMP FMBA ir. 17f.2/23ö.e., "Jelentés: 5 tagu brigád munkájáról, amit a nők között végzett," p. 1.

[98] "Több megértést és támogatást a női dolgozóknak," *Sztálin Vasmű Építője* (February 22, 1952), p. 3.

who shouted, "Brooms are more suitable for your hands than filthy wheelbarrows." They were derided publicly by the men as "weak girls."[99]

The women-only site provided a space on the larger construction site where women could train for and work in jobs that had traditionally been regarded as the exclusive province of men. Some on the all-women work site, like Klára Czavrik, replied to the taunts of men who urged her to return to housework with the response that "at home I would have accepted that, but I came here to build." She came to regard it as a matter of pride that she proved the men wrong and thus persevered in the face of their derision, earning the praise of party propagandists anxious to combat sexism on the site.[100] Despite these achievements, the women-only work site was marginalized on the larger construction site and failed to become a school for female skilled workers who would later take their place alongside men in building the new socialist city. Management and the party did try to integrate male and female labor by creating mixed brigades, but these were almost impossible to establish. This was not because of the lower ability of the women but because of resistance among the men. According to one party secretary, "It would be impossible to put men into mixed brigades because the men would not readily join them, and of those who would, only the weakest men would go."[101] The masculine culture of construction workers clashed sharply with attempts to integrate women into the industry's workforce. In part this culture associated masculinity and physical strength, thus identifying work in construction as male work. Male hostility contained another dimension tied to gendered notions of hierarchy shared by male workers outside construction. In a climate of shortages and frequent work stoppages, men believed it illegitimate that women were allowed to take work on the construction site. The memory of the high unemployment experienced by construction workers in the immediate postwar years was keenly felt.[102] As bottlenecks and shortages of raw materials led to some workers lying idle waiting for work, many construction workers saw the work stoppages as a shortage of work akin to the unemployment of the late 1940s. Newspapers in Sztálinváros carried complaints urging the authorities to "end unemployment among skilled workers."[103] One of the roots of male hostility to the introduction of female labor into construction in this context was identified by one woman

[99] "Női dolgozóink élen járnak a termelésben," *Sztálin Vasmű Építője* (November 23, 1951), p. 1.

[100] Ibid.

[101] FML MSZMP FMBA ir. 17f.1/22ö.e, "Jegyzőkönyv mely felvétett 1951.X.31-én megtartott Pártbizottsági ülésen," p. 6.

[102] The memories of the construction workers on the site of the poverty and unemployment of the late 1940s were recorded in the interviews collected in Ilona S. Dobos, *Szegényember Vízzel Főz: Életrajzi Vallomások—"Igaz történetek"* (Budapest, 1958).

[103] Fekete (n. 92 above).

who made it into a mixed brigade: "Women couldn't really work in construction when there wasn't enough work for the men."[104] The resistance of men to working alongside women in construction was a manifestation of deeply held notions about the relationship between gender and work across industry. Gendered notions of hierarchy that stated men were breadwinners and therefore had a greater right to work than their female workmates manifested themselves on the site. Consequently, men sought to maintain a monopoly of work, and thus of earnings, in the disorganized, shortage-ridden economy of the construction site. It was not only construction where the introduction of women to male-dominated jobs confronted working-class masculinity and similar gendered notions of hierarchy. In the Zala oil fields in 1951, workers on one drilling site instituted a work slowdown. Investigations revealed that it had been incited by two workers who claimed that "it wasn't worth working hard because new women workers earn more than us and we have to make a stand on this issue."[105] This revealed a perceived gendered hierarchy between workers that asserted a male worker's right to earn more than a woman in the same job.

Sztálinváros demonstrated at a local level what happened in industry as a whole to the state's attempts to integrate women into the industrial labor force. Nationally the state planned to recruit seventy-six thousand women into industry over the course of the first five-year plan. This drive to recruit women was combined with a campaign to subvert older gender hierarchies by breaking the male monopoly over certain skilled trades. A policy of affirmative action was introduced to ensure that a minimum of 30–50 percent of training places for skilled work were filled by young women.[106] This policy had all but failed in its first year. Although women were recruited into the workforce in greater numbers, presocialist patterns of gender differentiation within the workforce persisted. During 1951 the Light Industry Ministry, which covered industries where the workforce was already feminized, succeeded in fulfilling its plan, integrating 7,145 women into production as opposed to the 7,000 set out as a goal. In the male-dominated heavy industry, however, egalitarian policies made few inroads. In the sector covered by the Steel and Machine Industry Ministry, only 18,740 new female employees had been taken on, against a target of 29,000.[107] Despite the introduction of affirmative action at the national level—and, unevenly, at the local level, through initiatives like Sztálinváros's women-only construction site—gendered hierarchies reasserted themselves quickly.

[104] Józsefné Petróczi "Ma már Sztahanovista vasbetonszerelő vagyok," *Sztálin Vasmű Építője* (August 19, 1952), p. 2.

[105] ZML MSZMP ZMBA ir. 61f.4/3Agit/3ö.e.; "Hangulatjelentés, 1951, Február 2," p. 1.

[106] MOL MKS-276f.116/43ö.e., pp. 15–16.

[107] MOL MKS-276f.116/43ö.e., pp. 70–71.

Why was this the case? Part of the answer is provided by the persistence of gendered notions of the division between public and private in postwar Hungary, as well as by poor working conditions and the substantial demands made on the household as a result of poverty and goods shortages.[108] The furious resistance of male skilled workers rooted in gendered notions of hierarchy that were woven into working-class culture and the sympathy this met from foremen and site managers provides the largest part of the answer to this question. Sectors where masculinity and physical strength were associated proved to be unfriendly ground for female workers. Gendered notions of hierarchy that defined men as breadwinners more deserving both of work and of higher wages than women were proved extremely powerful across industry and construction.

Though the state attempted to challenge gendered hierarchies on Hungarian shop floors, it never came close to breaking them down. Unlike generational conflict, gender conflict was largely submerged, except in several exceptional cases. Claims to be skilled or experienced rested on foundations that were often interconnected with material conflict around gender identities. Such connections were rarely direct ones, however, and gendered notions of hierarchy were not merely the exclusive province of the skilled elite but were also to some extent shared by all male workers. The notions that men ought to earn more than women and had a right to preferential access to employment when work was scarce were deeply ingrained in working-class culture. In some sectors notions that associated masculinity and physical strength were superimposed onto this. Consequently, gendered hierarchies on Hungarian shop floors proved remarkably persistent.

VI. Workers and Worker-Peasants: Small-Scale Agriculture, Industrial Work, and Shop-Floor Tension

Perceived hierarchies based on a divide between the urban and the rural, as well as hierarchies between those with agricultural smallholdings and those without, were as interconnected with skill and working-class identity as were gendered hierarchies. In early 1953, according to party reports, skilled workers on the oil drilling platforms at Lovászi looked down on their unskilled colleagues. This led to serious tension between the two groups. Behind this tension lay two separate factors. The first was that the skilled oilmen resented the fact that their unskilled colleagues could begin training as skilled workers after working for only one year on the site. The second was that many of the un-

[108] Mark Pittaway, "Retreat from Collective Protest: Household, Gender, Work and Popular Opposition in Stalinist Hungary," in *Rebellious Families: Household Strategies and Collective Action in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,* ed. Jan Kok (New York, 2002), pp. 199–229.

skilled workers were so-called *kétlaki;* that is they labored both in industry and agriculture. According to the skilled oilmen, such workers "did not know how to work. . . . It isn't worth spending time with these workers, because they don't know how to learn anyway." This led the skilled oilmen to refuse to work alongside them and to request that they be allocated to different tasks at the drilling rigs.[109]

The divide between the skilled oilmen and the unskilled worker-peasants was not simply the product of the years of the first five-year plan. Lovászi was one of the drilling sites in the Zala oil fields in the far southwest rural area of the country. It had been established as recently as 1937, and consequently the culture of its workforce in the presocialist years was fused with the agrarian culture of the region in which it was located.[110] Dénes Vidos, who arrived in the Zala oil fields as a trainee engineer in 1947, wrote that at that time "just about every oil worker was *kétlaki.* They had land, a garden, kept animals, and worked for one of the companies in the oil fields."[111] Given the close links that existed between agriculture and industry, therefore, the growth of tension between workers and worker-peasants requires explanation.

Vidos exaggerated when he stated that "just about every oil worker was *kétlaki.*" Oil drilling in southwest Hungary was initially the result of investment by Standard Oil in 1937. They recruited their labor from the rural poor of the surrounding area, using high wages and a draconian disciplinary code to induct their new workers into the oil industry.[112] This was later combined with the construction of housing at the drilling rigs for a proportion of the workforce, which led those workers to leave the land behind. Others also gave up their land, keeping only a garden to grow food, and concentrated on work in the factory. A sizable proportion, however, retained their family landholding.[113] In 1950, an officer in the state security services reported that, of all Lovászi's workers, "60 percent come from the neighboring villages . . . and also farm. . . . They are therefore not strictly speaking industrial workers . . . but work on the oil fields to guarantee a fixed income for themselves."[114] With

[109] ZML MSZMP ZMBA ir. 61f.4/3PTO/22ö.e., "Feljegyzés, Lovászi, január 28."

[110] On the beginnings of oil drilling in Zala, see Ernő Budai, Győző Ferenc, and József Kovács, eds., *Ötven Éves a Magyar Kőolaj- és Földgázbányászat: KPV, 1937–1987* (Nagykanizsa, 1987), pp. 9–46; on the agrarian nature of presocialist Zala county, see Miklós Vaska, *Paraszti gazdálkodás Nován a két világháború között* (Zalaegerszeg, 1979).

[111] Dénes Vidos, *Zalai Olajos Történetek* (Zalaegerszeg, 1990), p. 40.

[112] Lajos Srágli, "Adatok az olajipari munkásság szociális helyzetének alakulásához, 1937–1944 (A MAORT munkásjóléleti intézkedés)," in *Közlemények Zala megye közgyűjteményeinek kutatásaiból, 1984–1985,* ed. Alajos Degré and Imre Halász (Zalaegerszeg, 1985), pp. 169–81; Budai et al., eds., *Ötven Éves a Magyar,* pp. 194–95.

[113] Budai et al., pp. 204–5.

[114] ZML MSZMP ZMBA ir. 57f.1/77ö.e., p. 41.

this differentiation among the workforce a hierarchy of skill was established. The *kétlaki* workers tended to be underrepresented in the key skilled positions in oil drilling; at Lovászi in 1952 only 3 percent of them were drilling masters—the key skilled workers who supervised the drilling process. Most occupied semiskilled or unskilled positions. Where they were skilled they tended to be carpenters or truck drivers on the site.[115] Though the division between those with smallholdings and those without was not directly a division between the skilled elite and the less skilled, skill was superimposed onto the divide between workers with agricultural smallholdings and those without.

The division between workers with no connection to the land and the *kétlaki* was smaller at the onset of socialist industrialization in the oil fields than in other industrial sectors. In the heavy engineering establishments situated in the industrial suburbs of Greater Budapest, hierarchies of skill were even more starkly superimposed onto perceived hierarchies based on an urban-rural divide. In one factory in the environs of the capital at the end of the 1930s, workers who lived in the industrial community surrounding the plant enjoyed a monopoly of the highest-paid skilled positions. Rural commuters, who came from as far as twenty kilometers away, were largely unskilled and semiskilled workers.[116] This was also true in smaller provincial industrial centers, where a permanent workforce lived in company housing or in urban centers near the workplace while *kétlaki* commuters took work on a seasonal basis.[117]

The new socialist state was deeply suspicious of *kétlaki* workers in general, and of Zala's *kétlaki* oil workers in particular. These suspicions had several roots. At the national level in 1948 the state began its collectivization drive in the countryside and sought to force all rural smallholders into agricultural producer cooperatives.[118] Alongside the collectivization drive it questioned the commitment of *kétlaki* workers to industrial labor, arguing that such workers would undermine production by concentrating on their smallholdings. It consequently sought to eliminate land ownership among industrial workers.[119] In Zala the oil workers were a politically suspect group in their own right. The

[115] ZML MSZMP ZMBA ir. 57f.2/Olajipar/25ó.e.; "Kimutatás az Ásványolajkutató és Mélyfuró V. Lovászi üzemében dolgozó kétlaki munkavállalókról."

[116] Lackó, "Gépgyári munkások az 1930-as években," pp. 3–44.

[117] Zoltán Szabó, *Cifra Nyomorúság: A Cserhát, Mátra, Bükk Földje és Népe* (Budapest, 1938), pp. 127–67; Zoltán Magyary and István Kiss, *A Közigazgatás és az Emberek: Ténymegállapító Tanulmány a Tatai Járás Közigazgatásáról* (Budapest, 1939), p. 99.

[118] Ferenc Donáth, *Reform és Forradalom: A Magyar Mezőgazdaság Strukturális Átalakulása, 1945–1975* (Budapest, 1977), pp. 101–56.

[119] PtSzL SZKL Zala Szakszervezetek Megyei Tanácsa (Zala County Council of Trade Unions, hereafter Zala SZMT)/31d./1949, "Üzemi Bizottságának, Bázakerrettye, 1949 december 1."

oil fields had been under American ownership until their confiscation, and this alone made the workforce politically suspect; but there had also been a marked lack of support for the Communist party among the workers prior to 1948.[120]

The party initiated national campaigns in 1950 and again in 1952 to force *kétlaki* workers to give their land to agricultural cooperatives.[121] The campaigns in the Zala oil fields were far from successful. When land was surrendered, local councils and state farms refused to accept it. A small minority of *kétlaki* workers took the view that the "land, which I've had to farm alongside work, has been a pain in my family's neck and in mine."[122] The overwhelming majority of *kétlaki* workers, however, were hostile to state attempts to make them hand over their land. In part this stemmed from the deep-seated hostility felt in many rural communities toward collective agriculture. During the very early stages of the collectivization drive in the county in 1949 the state security services noted that many village dwellers who worked in the oil fields "took positions openly hostile to agricultural producer cooperatives."[123] This hostility persisted throughout the early 1950s; one such worker, Sándor Bertok, "sought to prove to the working peasantry that surrendering land to collectives harmed the workers."[124] As food shortages spread and wage levels fell many workers remained attached to their land because it gave them a degree of security in the face of the shortages generated by the malfunctioning of the socialist economy. One oil worker refused to surrender his land, telling the party committee that his wife had told him that "it [the land] is there to help us live, because of it we have not starved, but if it is taken away from us we will [starve]."[125]

Severe shortages of goods like bread, fat, eggs, and soap seriously affected daily life in the oil fields from 1951, as the effects of state policies toward agriculture began to be directly felt in industrial areas.[126] These shortages caused a marked deterioration in relations between the *kétlaki* workers and

[120] On the circumstances of nationalization, see Géza Bencze, *Zala Megye Iparának Története a Felszabadulás Után (1945–1970)* (Zalaegerszeg, 1980), pp. 34–35; Lajos Srágli, "A dunántúli olajbányászat hároméves terve (Adatok a MAORT történetéhez), 1947–1949," in *Közlemények Zala Megye Közgyűjteményeinek Kutatásaiból 1986,* ed. Endre Gyimesi (Zalaegerszeg, 1986), pp. 295–307.

[121] *Kétlakiság* (Budapest, 1952).

[122] ZML MSZMP ZMBA ir. 61f.2/Agit/7ö.e., "Rákosi elvtárs a központi vezetőségi ülésen elhangzott beszámolóját üzemünk dolgozói lelkesen tanulmányozták át a Szabad Nép-ből"; ZML MSZMP ZMBA ir. 57f.2/Olajipar/25ö.e., "Levél a Bánya- és Energiaügyi Miniszteriumtól a Magyar Dolgozók Pártja Zalamegyei Pártbizottságának."

[123] ZML MSZMP ZMBA ir. 57f.1/78ö.e., p. 34.

[124] ZML MSZMP ZMBA ir. 57f.2/Agit/10ö.e., "Hangulatjelentés 37/5/365."

[125] ZML MSZMP ZMBA ir. 61f.2/Agit/7ö.e., "MDP MAORT Lovászi üzemi pártszervezet titkársága jelentés."

[126] Vidos (n. 111 above), pp. 94–99; the documents in ZML MSZMP ZMBA ir. 57f.2/Agit/10ö.e. and ZML MSZMP ZMBA ir. 57f.2/Agit/11ö.e.

those who had cut their ties to the land. Resentment grew because workers regarded it as unjust that their *kétlaki* workmates were able to make purchases in state shops even though they often had access to pigs, chickens, vegetables, and corn at home. Those without land had to go into the neighboring villages to buy their food on the black market.[127] Workers complained that their *kétlaki* workmates refused to bring them food yet expected to be able to purchase goods in the state shops on the site.[128]

These tensions fueled conflicts that grew at the drilling platforms during the early 1950s. Furthermore, growing labor shortages in the oil fields and the pressures of collectivization on rural households drove a reconstitution of the oil industry's workforce that in turn shaped the social makeup of the *kétlaki* workforce. Rural households in Zala responded to high taxation, the collectivization drive, and the poverty these measures induced by sending their sons to work as unskilled laborers in the oil industry.[129] In 1952 enterprise management surveyed those members of the workforce at Lovászi who belonged to a household with agricultural land. Only 45.6 percent of such workers held the land in their own name; in 53.4 percent of all cases it was the parents of the worker who actually held the land.[130] Newer *kétlaki* workers, it was said, lacked the disciplined ethos of those who had had to work under the former capitalist owners of the oil wells.[131]

The decline in real wages across industry and the spread of food shortages reshaped worker attitudes toward their work. Smallholders were faced with onerous compulsory deliveries and a struggle for survival in agriculture. Food shortages underlined for *kétlaki* workers the importance of land, while falling real wages sharpened their discontent with working conditions in the oil fields. At the Bázakerettye drilling plant, *kétlaki* workers slept on the night shift during the harvest season as a result, allegedly, of working in the fields during the day.[132] Many were absent altogether during the harvest period, leading to a lack of manpower in the factory and thus disruption in production.[133]

The disruption of production, different attitudes toward labor, and conflicts over consumption and notions of skill all fed tensions between different groups of workers based on social origin. Oil workers complained in 1951 that among

[127] Vidos, p. 94.

[128] ZML MSZMP ZMBA ir. 61f.4/2/4ö.e., "Jegyzőkönyv."

[129] Pittaway, "Retreat from Collective Protest," pp. 215–20.

[130] ZML MSZMP ZMBA ir. 57f.2/Olajipar/25ö.e., "Kimutatás az Ásványolajkutató és Mélyfuró Vállalat dolgozóinak földtulajdonáról: Nagykanizsa, 1952, junius 7."

[131] For some of the differences between presocialist and socialist oil workers, see Gábor Mocsár, *Égő Arany* (Budapest, 1970), pp. 212–13.

[132] ZML MSZMP ZMBA ir. 57f.2/Ipar/7ö.e., "Jelentés, 1952, Julius 4," p. 1.

[133] ZML MSZMP ZMBA ir. 61f.4/2/7o.e, "Jegyzőkönyv 1951, december 6," pp. 4–6.

their colleagues "there are many who have land. . . . It is possible to see this in their work, especially in the summer, when the agricultural season is at its peak."[134] In 1953 workers complained about those of their workmates who owned land. According to the complainants, the *kétlaki* workers "come to our factory to relax and earn their money there, and then go home and work on the land."[135]

Tension between urban workers and their *kétlaki* colleagues was not restricted to the Zala oil fields, but because of their specific rural working-class culture these workers provide an especially useful vantage point from which to view the issue. In factories and industrial communities up and down the country tensions existed. In Tatabánya, urban miners complained that *kétlaki* workers "take loaves and loaves of the bread from the town dwellers; the same happens with the flour that they take packets of . . . and [they] hinder our shopping for food."[136] These tensions strengthened distinctions based on notions of a hierarchy between the urban and the rural. The cases of the "agricultural cooperative production line" in the Danube Shoe Factory and the *kétlaki* workers in the Zala oil fields illustrate the degree to which such perceived hierarchies did not disappear but adapted to socialist conditions.

VII. Conclusion

It had become clear by the time of Stalin's death in March 1953, and the effective beginnings of de-Stalinization in Hungary that followed at the end of June, that the regime's attempts to create a "new working class" had failed. The industrial workforce had grown substantially, yet presocialist working-class culture and the hierarchies embedded in it had reproduced themselves under socialist conditions. The attempts to train large numbers of new skilled workers through crash training schemes had largely failed. Likewise, attempts to recruit substantial numbers of women into the industrial workforce as mens' equals had been frustrated. Workers from rural areas or who were members of families with agricultural smallholdings remained culturally distinct from urban, industrial workers. The hierarchical relationships between the urban, experienced, skilled elite and traditionally subordinate groups had reproduced themselves despite Hungarian Stalinism's revolution in production and the expansion of the workforce that had occurred between 1948 and 1953. Fur-

[134] ZML MSZMP ZMBA ir. 57f.2/Agit/10ö.e., "37/6-294," p. 1.

[135] ZML MSZMP ZMBA ir. 61f.3/3/Agit/4ö.e., "Népnevelők észrevételei."

[136] PtSzL. SZKL SZOT Szociálpolitikai Osztály (Social Policy Department, hereafter Szociálpolitika)/21d./1952, "Szénszállító és Szólgáltató Vállalat Szakszervezeti Bizottsága, Tatabánya—Jegyzőkönyv Társadalmi ellenőrök részére megtartott értekezeltről," p. 1.

thermore, although the workforce was internally divided along lines of skill, gender, generation, and social origin, it was deeply antagonistic to the regime due to the poverty and repression that characterized Hungary's early socialist years. It was not, however, until the upheaval of the 1956 Revolution that the regime came to recognize the extent of its failure. In 1958 the party initiated an investigation into "the political, economic, and cultural situation of the working class" in order to ascertain why the party had been deserted by its supposed working-class constituency during the Revolution.[137] In an unpublished written submission to those conducting the survey, the party secretary of the industrial Budapest district of Kőbánya identified both working-class antagonism toward the regime and, in a more confused fashion, the internal divisions that characterized the workforce. "One part of the workforce does not agree with us," he wrote; "it does not accept this system." This group consisted of "toolmakers, turners, etc." who had lost their prestige and high wages. Consequently they took an openly antiregime stand. Alongside the skilled workers were "declassed" groups, who acted as the spreaders of rumors and informal political information on the shop floor and thus confused the "honest" and "diligent" workers.[138]

Both the failure of the state to create its "new working class" and the remarkable persistence of hierarchy draw attention to the limits of dictatorship in the Hungarian case, demonstrating that in Hungarian factories the Stalinist dictatorship's control over social process was far from absolute. Indeed, they suggest that the popular experience of Rákosi's dictatorship in Hungary's factories, mines, and construction sites was not shaped according to a script prepared in party headquarters in Budapest. Party and government policies were only one very important influence in shaping the experiences of industrial workers. The climate generated by the circumstances of socialist production, the resilience of working-class culture, and particularly the importance of skill to production and to notions of hierarchy were at least as important in molding working-class identity in these years.

The reproduction of hierarchy and the resilience of working-class culture in the face of state-initiated social change both point to continuities in the country's social history that hitherto have been little explored. Working-class identity remained strong throughout the socialist era, while the industrial workforce continued to be marked by hierarchies of gender, generation, and social origin.

[137] For the background to the survey and some of its published results, see "Az MSZMP Központi Bizottságának Határozata a Munkásosztállyal Kapcsolatos Egyes Feladatokról," in *A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt határozatai és dokumentumai, 1956–1962,* 2d ed., ed. Henrik Vass and Ágnes Ságvári (Budapest, 1973), pp. 272–77.

[138] MOL MKS 288f.21/1958/19ö.e., p. 301.

The temporary collapse of the socialist regime during the 1956 Revolution brought to the surface the depth of working-class discontent as workers demanded greater democracy in both the political system and the workplace. Workers, however, were not united in their behavior during the Revolution. Working-class youth formed the backbone of many of the mass demonstrations and provided the revolutionaries who turned them into an armed uprising. Skilled workers, with foremen and engineers, dominated the workers' councils that emerged during the Revolution. The *kétlaki* workers returned to their villages, leaving the factories behind.[139]

Following the Soviet intervention in November 1956 the new regime of János Kádár sought to generate long-term stability through a reconstruction rather than a restoration of the socialist system.[140] As far as Hungary's industrial workers were concerned this entailed a concerted attempt by the regime to accommodate working-class culture. The ruling party sought to restore its legitimacy among workers by recasting its identity as that of a "workers' party." This meant that improvements in working-class living standards and social policy measures became central to its program.[141] The consolidation of Kádár's rule led to the emergence of a tacit settlement in the workplace during the 1960s in which the regime accepted the preeminent position of the skilled elite in the workplace. This tacit settlement both implicitly acknowledged hierarchies within the workforce and granted the skilled elite considerable informal countervailing power vis-à-vis management.[142]

Despite the accommodation of the Kádár régime to working-class culture, however, perceptions of discontent and exploitation that formed the basis of the persistence of working-class identity survived well into the Kádár era. In the mid-1970s one writer reporting on working-class opinion and life in a

[139] Much has now been written on the social history of 1956. On workers in the revolution, the best account is still Bill Lomax, *Hungary 1956* (London, 1976). For the role of youth, see László Eőrsi, *Ferencváros 1956: A kerület fegyveres csoportjai* (Budapest, 1997); on the workers' councils, see Gyula Kozák and Adrienne Molnár, eds., *"Szuronyok Hegyén Nem Lehet Dolgozni": Válogatás 1956-os munkástanács-vezetők visszaemlékezéseiből* (Budapest, 1994). Information on *kétlaki* workers during the Revolution is more fragmentary; see Bill Lomax and István Kemény, eds., *Magyar munkástanácsok 1956-ban* (Paris, 1986), p. 202; for the observations of the police immediately following the Soviet intervention, see Erzsébet Kajári, ed., *Rendörségi Napi Jelentések 1956, Október 23–December 12* (Budapest, 1996).

[140] Melinda Kalmár, *Ennivaló és Hozomány: A Kora Kádárizmus Ideológiája* (Budapest, 1998).

[141] György Földes, "A Kádár-rendszer és a munkásság," *Eszmélet* 18–19 (1993): 57–73.

[142] István Kemény, "Kompromisszumok egyezség nélkül," originally published as "Hol tart a társadalmi kompromisszum Magyarországon," *Magyar Füzetek* (January 1978). Reprint, *Szociológiai Írások* (Szeged, 1992), p. 208.

Budapest factory recorded one of the workers complaining that the workers "get everything we have with such difficulty in this country."[143] Tensions between different groups of workers based on notions of hierarchy within the workforce seem also to have persisted throughout the socialist era. In the aftermath of the 1968 economic reform, conflict between rural workers in the factories and the urban "core" of the workforce was reported, and it was skilfully used by opponents of economic reform within the party apparatus.[144] Class identity and the hierarchies embedded in working-class culture proved remarkably persistent even in the face of radical social change. The question of continuity in the labor and social history of the socialist era in Hungary is one, therefore, that requires further exploration.

The social history of industrial labor in postwar East-Central Europe is a relatively undeveloped field. This examination of industrial labor in Hungary suggests some ways in which this history might be approached. It is clear from the Hungarian case and from research on workers in the GDR, Czechoslovakia, and Poland that, in the Central European socialist states at least, presocialist working-class cultures remained resilient. Stalinist regimes in these countries did not remake working classes anew. Socialist institutions and the environment of production, however, did reshape the context in which such working-class cultures reasserted themselves and were in turn remolded. This has been shown in this article for the Hungarian case. For the GDR, Peter Hübner has demonstrated how shop-floor institutions like socialist work brigades provided the scope for certain continuities in working-class culture to emerge in a socialist context.[145] We know relatively little, however, about the shifts in working-class identity in these countries. The forces that shaped worker identity in each of these states were similar to those examined in this article for Hungary. In all the countries of East-Central Europe the state attempted to challenge hierarchies in the workplace based on skill, gender, generation, and social origin, though the timing and nature of these attempts varied from country to country. The workforce expanded across the region in the context of an industrialization drive that generated widespread shortages, transforming the environment in which production took place. This article therefore suggests the need for studies of all the countries of the region that would examine shifting worker identities in conjunction with the development of socialist factory regimes and state policies to break down traditional hierarchies on the shop floor.

[143] Ferenc Halmos, *Illő Alázattal* (Budapest, 1978), pp. 131–32.

[144] Károly Attilla Soós, "Béralku és 'sérelmi politika,'" in *Magyar gazdaság és szociológia a 80-as években,* ed. Tamás Miklós (Budapest, 1988), pp. 89–110.

[145] Hübner (n. 12 above), pp. 211–45.